

Indiana Cabins

DEBATE 3

YOUTH-INDIAN

7122017.085 014117



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2012 with funding from
Friends of The Lincoln Collection of Indiana, Inc.

<http://archive.org/details/abrahamlixx00linc>

Abraham Lincoln before 1860

Indiana Cabins

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection



HOME OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN --IN SPENCER COUNTY, INDIANA. --PHOTO--1860

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
LIBRARY
1100 EAST 58TH STREET
CHICAGO, ILL. 60637
634



PLEASE CREDIT:

The Lincoln Museum,
Fort Wayne, Indiana,

a part of Lincoln National Corporation,
Identification No. 636

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 1235

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

December 8, 1952

ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S EIGHTH YEAR

An autobiographical sketch written by Abraham Lincoln bears this comment on the migration of the family from Kentucky to Indiana: "We reached our new home about the time the state came into the Union." President James Madison signed the bill admitting Indiana to statehood on December 11, 1816. The exact dates of the departure and arrival of the Lincolns not being known, it has been customary to refer to their removal as having taken place sometime between Thanksgiving and Christmas in the year 1816. Abraham at this time was seven years old, or to put it in his own vernacular "in his eighth year."

The Thanksgiving and the Christmas seasons were the terminals of the most fascinating period of the year for the growing boy in America. The amazing stories of the Pilgrims braving the wild and turbulent ocean in their frail wind driven craft; the expressions of gratitude for survival; and eventually, the abundance of food from field and forest contributed to the wonderment of the harvest festival. When Thanksgiving was over Christmas could not be far behind, in fact it appears in this modern day as if December is trying to jostle November out of its rightful place in the calendar. Christmas in primitive America offered the occasion for telling the story of another marvelous journey, this one by land, in the midst of which a child was born in poor surroundings marked by a star. After rich gifts had been presented by learned messengers and angels had sung their praise with divine fervor, the infant was secretly hurried to another country for fear of a jealous king who would destroy the infant. These November and December pageants were high spots which tested the imagination of every child.

So it was between Thanksgiving and Christmas, in his eighth year when the wonder days of youth are at their zenith, that Abraham Lincoln reached his Hoosier home site. He later described the arrival in verse:

"When first my father settled here
'Twas then the frontier line
The panther's scream filled night with fear
and bears preyed on the swine."

The primitive condition of the country in which his father chose to locate is further visualized by Abraham Lincoln in these words, "He settled in an unbroken forest and the clearing away of the surplus wood was the great task ahead." The great seal of the state of Indiana portrays a pioneer with axe in hand attacking the virgin growth of timber.

The immediate occupation which would engage the Lincoln family upon arrival would be the erection of their cabin home. It is impossible to exaggerate the excitement which would be kindled in the seven year old boy by having an opportunity to do some of the more simple tasks in helping to build the house in which they were to live, to literally cut it out of the wilderness and made it habitable. It would not take long with the help of neighboring pioneers to put up the four walls and get a roof over their heads. When the Lincolns moved to Illinois many years later one who helped to build their cabin there recalled that it took but four days to cut the logs and erect the rustic dwelling.

The typical log cabin of the pioneer similar to those occupied by the Lincolns was 18 x 20 feet and eight feet high from floor to rafter. The logs were twelve inches

in diameter, so the heavy timbers needed would total sixteen pieces 20 feet long for the front and back, sixteen pieces 18 feet long for the two ends, plus a few more of various lengths to fill in the gables. Approximately 40 pieces were used for the main structure before the erection of the cabin would begin. Four cornerstones were established and two side logs hewed on one side were placed on these stones. The properly notched logs were then put in place one on top of the other. Smaller poles were utilized for the roof and clapboards three or four feet long split from straight grained cuts were used as a covering and kept in place by weight poles which extended the width of the roof over each succeeding course of clapboards. Spaces for a door, window, and fireplace were cut out of the logs and a stick chimney built and then the family was ready to make such interior improvements as were needed.

An incident occurred not long after the cabin was erected which Abraham never forgot and he thought it was of sufficient importance to include it in a sketch of his life he had written in the third person. He recalled that he "took an early start as a hunter which was never much improved afterward. A few days before the completion of his eighth year, in the absence of his father, a flock of wild turkeys approached the new log cabin and Abraham with rifle-gun, standing inside, shot through a crack and killed one of them." The concluding statement is a confirmation of his introductory words about the episode. "He has never since pulled a trigger on any larger game." The long heavy Kentucky rifle would be a cumbersome instrument for a seven year old boy to handle, but apparently he was able to rest the barrel on the log beneath the crack through which he took aim and fired. As early as his eighth year he had not only helped to build their cabin home but also to provide food for the family.

The logs used to build the cabin represented but a minor part in "the clearing away of the surplus wood" and it is of importance that Abraham followed this statement in his sketch with this affirmation: "Abraham, though very young, was large of his age, and had an axe put in his hands at once." Even if he were "large of his age", seven years is very early for a boy to start handling an axe. It is with some degree of anxiety today that parents present a hatchet to a son of boy scout age.

The removing of the surplus wood was the great task ahead of the pioneer and as the Lincolns arrived late in the year they would be especially pressed to clear enough ground for a crop to be put in the following spring as the planting season came early in southern Indiana. The usual procedure in making a clearing was to leave standing, trees eighteen inches or over in diameter. All those smaller than that would be cut down, trimmed and the brush and logs piled around the upright trees. The undergrowth was dug out by the roots with a grubbing hoe and piled on the great pyramids of newly cut timber. When weather conditions were just right, these great piles of green tree trunks and branches were burned, which in itself was a spectacle worth observing and an exciting adventure for a boy the age of Abe. Taking all things into consideration, the plans for removal to Indiana, the trip itself with the crossing of the mighty Ohio, plus those incidents which occurred shortly after arrival, must have made Abraham Lincoln's eighth year one of the happiest of his life.

Lincoln's Youth
Indiana Years
Seven to Twenty-one
1816-1830

by Louis A. Warren

APPLETON · CENTURY · CROFTS, INC.
New York

flowed by high water. The three following sections in the township consisted of broken or uneven land mostly poor, of second- or third-rate quality.¹⁸ Certainly the discovery of "a living spring of water" was important in determining where the cabin would be located. "Springs furnishing water suitable for drinking purposes existed on the west side of Lincoln's eighty acres. . . . Such water was an asset to any tract of land. . . . On the south line of Lincoln's eighty there was a brook ten links wide running north-west."¹⁹ The immediate site of the cabin was a knoll which, because of the elevation, would be dry and healthy. Furthermore, their cabin would face the township trace over which they had hewn their way.

Just how the family had protected themselves from the weather during their stops along the way is not known. Naturally their first thoughts upon arrival would be a permanent shelter. The crude half-face camp which Thomas had thrown together when he had selected his land would have provided some security. Or perhaps the mother and the children found a temporary lodging in a neighbor's house, while their own cabin was being put up.²⁰

The harvest season was now past and the settlers were free to help in the home-building project. Thomas Lincoln was experienced in cabin building, having assisted in erecting many in Kentucky, including two or three of his own, and had once contracted for supplying the timber for a mill.²¹ The construction of a cabin was not a time-consuming enterprise. One family reaching southern Indiana about the same time as the Lincolns reported: "Arrived on Tuesday, cut logs for the cabin on Wednesday, raised the cabin on Thursday, clapboards from an old sugar camp put on Friday and on Saturday made the crude furniture to go to housekeeping."²²

→ The routine in building a cabin was as follows: the trees to be felled were carefully selected to provide logs a foot in diameter and twenty feet long. Sixteen of these logs were needed, eight for the front and eight for the back wall. Sixteen

logs, eighteen feet long were cut for the two end walls, and in addition, a few shorter ones of proper length were cut to fill the gables. This would mean that approximately forty logs, one foot in diameter, would have to be prepared. They would then be rolled to the cabin site or pulled there by oxen or horses. Four large stones would be laid at the corners for the foundation, and, with an axeman at each corner to notch the logs properly for a close fit as they were put in place, construction would get under way.

Smaller logs for the loft floor would be laid, then others reaching from gable to gable, to serve as joists for the roof, and finally the ridge pole would be set in position. Clapboards, a half-inch thick, would be set in their proper courses on these joists to make the roof waterproof, and over the clapboards poles would be laid to keep them in place. After this the openings for the door, window, and fireplace would be cut out and a stick chimney would be constructed on the outside of the cabin to connect with the place that had been cut for it. The construction of such a home with the help of neighbors was not a difficult task. It should not have taken more than four days to have the structure ready for occupancy.

Now the chinking on the outside could begin, and this is where the children could be of real help. Abraham could split thin slabs of wood and drive them between the logs, up as high as he could reach, where there were open places, wedging them in one by one. Sarah could then daub moistened clay between the logs where the wedges had not completely filled the cracks. It must have been a fascinating experience for a boy and girl of their ages to assist in building the home in which they were to live. In a very special sense they could refer to the cabin as "our home." It could be said, quite literally, that the Lincoln family had cut their house out of the wilderness.

When the cabin had been made fairly wind and moisture proof on the outside, the process of chinking and daubing

would be continued on the inside, but with a little more care, so as to give the cabin interior walls a more even surface. Later a floor made of puncheons could be put down, but for the time being the hard clay was allowed to serve. In one of the corners there was an opening into the loft and pegs were driven into the logs to serve as a ladder.²²

Once the cabin itself had been completed, Thomas turned his attention to building a pole bedstead in one of the corners opposite the fireplace. At the proper height from the floor holes were made between the logs to receive the side poles, and a corner post set out on the floor to which these poles could be attached. Slat were then laid across the side poles to hold the mattress made of corn husks or leaves. On top of this Nancy laid the feather bed brought from Kentucky. The next piece of furniture was a table. This Thomas handily constructed, as well as chairs, benches, or stools, or possibly all three. A corner cupboard, which took more time to make, rounded out the furnishings.

The Lincolns had brought with them a spinning wheel, a skillet or spider, a Dutch oven, a large kettle, and small pans. A few wooden bowls, pewter dishes, knives and forks, and a few simple utensils completed their cooking and dining equipment. Besides the light from the fireplace, they may have had candles or a simple lamp made by lighting a wick which was placed in a cup of bear's grease.

There is a tendency to visualize the pioneer cabins in Kentucky and Indiana as they appear in photographs taken many years after they had been deserted and used for purposes other than dwellings. Usually they present a dilapidated condition and repulsive surroundings. As an experienced builder Thomas erected a house that was adequate for the family's needs and similar to the other cabin homes of that era. It was new and clean, with the aroma of newly cut timber both within and without the walls. We hope that they were able to get the new home ready to occupy by December 16,

*Copied from a report
in the file of the
Lincoln Boyhood Na-
tional Memorial.
Shared by Bill Bartelt
8/30/11.*

A Survey of
Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial
and
Lincoln City

by
John E. Santosuosso
for
Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial
Albert W. Banton
Superintendent

August 21, 1970

After examining all the artistic and photographic evidence, Larrabee estimates that the 1829 cabin was about twenty-five feet in length, with a door height of about sixty-seven inches. The two windows on the front were about thirty inches wide and fifty inches high.⁶⁵

E. The Fate of the 1829 Lincoln Cabin

The disappearance and possible fate of the 1829 cabin is such a complex matter that it is best treated as a separate subject by itself. Before looking at what may have happened to this particular structure, the reader may find it helpful to learn what has become the fate of other Lincoln dwellings, both authentic and traditional.

When one begins to explore this subject, he soon gets the feeling that surely Thomas Lincoln started the first mobile home factory. Lincoln homes never remain where Thomas put them. The earliest of the Lincoln homes to go rerrily a wandering was the one built on the bank of the Sangamon River in Macon, County, Illinois, in 1830. This was taken to Chicago by Dennis Hanks, who exhibited it at the Sanitary Fair in June 1865.⁶⁶ What happened to it after this momentous event is unknown to this writer.

The Thomas Lincoln cabin at Coosenest Prairie, Coles County, Illinois, also journeyed to Chicago, never to return. In 1892 the cabin was sold to the "Abraham Lincoln Log Cabin Association" for ten thousand dollars. The association consisted for the most part of a group of Chicago promoters who bought the cabin in order to exhibit it at the World's Fair of 1893. The cabin was set up close to the Fair, but was not officially part of it. After the Fair it was dismantled and stored in the yard of the Libby Prison War Museum on Wabash Avenue. About 1895 or 1896 the War Museum managers advertised in the Chicago papers for the cabin owners to remove it, or it would be sold or possibly donated to some historical society. Sometime after this it disappeared and may have met the inglorious end of being used for firewood.⁶⁷

The traditional birthplace cabin (which this writer does not believe is authentic) has also traveled extensively, although it

65. Ibid., proportional diagram of front of dwelling "C", following p. 24.

66. Hertz, Hidden Lincoln, p. 282.

67. Charles H. Coleman, Abraham Lincoln and Coles County, Illinois, New Brunswick, N. J., 1955, pp. 44-47.

eventually came back home. The cabin, after being moved to the Lincoln farm near Hodgenville, Kentucky, was dismantled and shipped to the Tennessee Centennial, held in Nashville in 1897. After being exhibited there, it was erected in Central Park, New York, and then taken to the Buffalo Exposition. It was for a time stored in the Poffenhausen Mansion at College Point, New York. In 1906 it returned to Kentucky to put in an appearance at the Louisville Home-Coming Celebration. It was stored in Louisville, until it was time for the laying of the cornerstone of the memorial building at Hodgenville. Since 1911, when the building was completed, it has rested comfortably in that building.⁶⁸

Several observations can be made from this seeming digression. Lincoln cabins have frequently made their way to various fairs and expositions and then sometimes disappeared. Maybe the 1829 Spencer County cabin traveled the same route. Perhaps local tradition has also confused the fate of the 1829 cabin with that of other Lincoln cabins. Numerous stories claim that the cabin was sold to men from Chicago and taken there or to Springfield, Illinois.⁶⁹ What really happened to the cabin, no one can for certain say.

The Lincoln cabin, or at least the logs of the cabin, must still have been on the old Lincoln farm as late as November, 1871. On November 28, 1871, James Gentry, Jr., deeded to Henry Lewis, John Shellito, Robert Mitchell, and Charles West of Cincinnati the southwest quarter of Section 32, Township No. 4 South, Range 5 West, as well as certain other properties. The gentlemen from Cincinnati, who soon would develop the town of Lincoln City, had purchased for themselves the site of the 1829 cabin—but not the cabin itself. Excepted from the sale was the "log house, known as the Lincoln House which stands on the west half of the first described tract of land and which was built by Abraham Lincoln and his father Thomas, and which has been heretofore sold."⁷⁰ The name of the actual buyer of the house is not given.

68. Louis A. Warren, Lincoln's Parentage and Childhood, New York, 1926, p. 89; Benjamin H. Davis, "Report of Research on the Traditional Abraham Lincoln Birthplace Cabin," Hodgenville, Ky.: Abraham Lincoln National Historical Park, February 15, 1949 (copy in files, Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial), p. 33.

69. Notebook of Joseph E. Wiebe, p. 53; Recorded interview with Reed Brooner of Dale, June 30, 1970, see p.250 of this report.

70. Spencer County Deed Book, Vol. 33, p. 432.

On September 10, 1886, the Dale, Indiana Reporter published a page one story entitled "Lincoln and His Indiana Home." After discussing the purchase of the Lincoln homestead by a "company of Cincinnati capitalists," the Reporter mentions that "another company of men" was interested in the area. This was a company of "relic hunters" that was looking for some kind of a curiosity associated with the Lincolns. They came upon "an old log hut that Abe Lincoln had helped to build. The Lincoln family had erected the walls, and the building had been completed by other parties." This sounds like a description of the 1829 cabin, although the Reporter is vague as to the precise location of the structure. The relic hunters obtained the cabin from the owner on the promise (which they fulfilled) that they would build him a new house of the same dimensions. Their intention was to remove the Lincoln cabin and reconstruct it in some city park as a monument to the President. However, according to the Reporter, after the house was torn down and the logs piled up, enthusiasm for the project died, and the logs were permitted to decay. This story, while not without its difficulties, may give us the real answer as to what happened to the 1829 cabin. After being torn down the logs were simply left to rot. It also may explain some of the local traditions concerning the disappearance of the cabin. Perhaps these men intended to take it to Chicago or Springfield. Maybe they were from one of those cities.⁷¹

By 1874 the cabin, no matter where it went or did not go, was no longer standing. In that year the Cincinnati, Rockport, and Southwestern Railway was completed from Rockport north to the county line. The railroad did and still does pass just a short distance to the west of the Lincoln cabin site. Excursion trains to Lincoln City soon grew popular. A correspondent for the Cincinnati Commercial who signs himself Beadle was on the very first of those excursion trips, in May, 1874. He mentions that the most delightful part of the trip was the halt at the Lincoln homestead and a walk to the grave of Nancy Hanks Lincoln. He says that Lincoln City is the ambitious title given to the railroad station and two or three frame structures (houses) on the Lincoln farm.⁷² If any sort of log building had been visible, it seems certain that this man would have been interested enough to report it.

71. Original paper in O. V. Brown collection, Santa Claus Land, Santa Claus, Indiana (copy in files, Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial).

72. The Rockport Republican, May 27, 1874 (Rockport Public Library), p. 4.

Another correspondent, W. W. Webb of the Evansville Daily Journal, is more explicit that there was no cabin. He writes in June of 1874: "We went from the grave /of Nancy Lincoln/ to where the old Lincoln House formerly stood. The ground where it stood has been ploughed up and planted. We stood about these logs that had echoed the voice of her that sung gentle lullaby's to him that afterward spoke liberty to millions; but the spirit of greatness has gone and the spirit of sadness has come."⁷³ Webb's comments are of special interest, because they indicate that already by 1874 the cabin site area had been disturbed by ploughing and planting. The fact that he "stood about these logs" seems to prove that as late as June, 1874, the 1829 cabin had not been hauled away and that the remains of at least some of it were still in the general vicinity of where it stood.

If the above speculations, theories, and hints as to what became of the cabin do not excite the reader, we can present him with a somewhat different story which may be more to his liking. This one comes from our old friend C. C. Schreeder. Schreeder was told that the cabin stood until 1874, when it was sold to Captain William Revis of Evansville who tore it down and shipped it by rail to Rockport. From Rockport it was shipped on barges (he uses the plural) up to Cincinnati where it was worked up into relics and sold to the general public.⁷⁴

There are problems with this explanation of the cabin's disappearance. Schreeder evidently does not know of the sale of the cabin by Gentry prior to the sale of the homestead to Henry Lewis and his associates. While the railroad was completed from Lincoln City to Rockport in 1874, the Rockport papers make no mention at any time during that year of either Captain Revis or of the coming of the cabin to their city. The Rockport Republican in 1874 occasionally published lists of the steamboats and their masters that called at that city. The name of Revis does not appear in any of those lists.

Of the mysterious Mr. Revis we know almost nothing. A search (by no means complete) of the Evansville Journal for June, July, and August of 1874 did not turn up the name of Revis among those of the numerous steamboat masters who were calling at that port. The Evansville City Directory for 1874 does list a "Wm. Revis,

73. Evansville Daily Journal, June 2, 1874 (Willard Library, Evansville), p. 4.

74. C. C. Schreeder, "The Lincolns and Their Home," p. 1.

boatman, res. 1012 Main."⁷⁵ This may be our man, but if it is, then Captain Revis was in Evansville for only a brief time. He is not in the directory for 1872-73 (published in 1872) or the one for 1875. One other possible reference to the good Captain does exist. The two old women interviewed by W. R. Rings in 1927 claimed that the Lincoln cabin "was purchased by a resident of Newburg /sic/ for exhibition purposes with the stipulation that he should build /sic/ another house suitable for tenants on the same spot."⁷⁶ It just may be that William Revis was a resident of Newburgh, near Evansville, or that he moved there after the 1874 directory was published. In fairness to the Captain we must also mention that there was an exposition in Cincinnati during 1874 where the cabin might have been exhibited. This was the Cincinnati Industrial Exposition held from September 2 to October 3, 1874.⁷⁷

At this point, dear reader, you are left to your own devices as to what Mr. Revis may or may not have done with the 1829 cabin. In any case, Schreeder claims that in the latter part of the summer of 1874 he personally made his first visit to Lincoln City. The Lincoln home was not standing, but he found one log (Webb a few months earlier referred to logs) which had been left at the cabin site, because it was thought to be too decayed to be removed. From this Schreeder obtained a piece of sound white oak timber about six feet long and four inches thick. About 1919 he had this squared and polished on three sides. Schreeder had it cut into blocks six inches long and says that he gave all of them away except one to historical societies and museums.⁷⁸ One of these is on display in the Evansville Museum. It is approximately six inches long, two inches high, and four inches wide. On it is the following inscription: "Taken from log of the LINCOLN LOG CABIN Spencer Co. Ind. Presented by COL. C. C. SCHREEDER Evansville, Ind."⁷⁹ You are cordially invited to visit Col. Schreeder's block of wood any day but Monday, when the museum is closed.

75. Williams Evansville City Directory for 1874, H. Thornton Bennett, compiler, Evansville, 1874 (Evansville Museum), p. 236. For a number of years the directory also listed a Wm. Reavis, who apparently was a prominent attorney in the city.

76. Letter from W. R. Rings to Paul V. Brown, November 14, 1927.

77. Rockport Republican Journal, August 19, 1874, p. 2.

78. Schreeder, "The Lincolns and Their Home," pp. 1-2.

79. The accession no. is 27.1695. The museum has no records as to how or when it obtained the specimen, other than that it was obtained prior to 1927.

Col. Schreeder was by no means the only souvenir hunter to cart off pieces of the cabin. The Rev. J. T. Hobson writes:

The old Indiana house, built by Thomas Lincoln, in 1817, was torn down, and the logs shipped away, many years ago, except one log. Isaac Houghland, a reliable man and merchant of Lincoln City, was in possession of this log and stated to me that a man by the name of Skelton said he would make oath that it was one of the logs of the old Lincoln house. Mr. Houghland kindly gave me two blocks, which I saw his son chop from the log.⁸⁰

James Stephens, who lived near Gentryville, relates that he saw a great many strangers come to the old Lincoln house and that frequently they would gather relics to take with them. He saw several take a hatchet and cut chips from the logs from which they intended to make souvenir toothpicks.⁸¹ Maybe Stephens is close to the truth. Another man claims he was present when part of the Lincoln home was torn away, and the sill to the porch was sawed and split into small sticks for souvenirs.⁸² Perhaps the Lincoln cabin was not permitted the honorable end of being taken to Chicago or Cincinnati, or of being allowed to quietly rot away. Maybe the souvenir hunters reaped their usual reckless harvest of blocks, and chips, and toothpicks.

80. J. T. Hobson, Footprints of Abraham Lincoln, Dayton, Ohio, 1909, p. 33.

81. James E. Stephens, Boonville, Ind., letter to W. E. Williams of Boonville, May 28, 1915, in Brief Prepared by the Warrick County Lincoln Route Association : And Presented to and Filed with the Indiana Lincoln Memorial Highway Commission, no date or place of pub. (library, Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial), p. 50. Stephens visited the farm and Lincoln house at the time Jacob Oskins lived a mile south of the farm. Jacob was the son of William Oskins, who owned the Lincoln farm from 1853 to 1859 (see Bearss, Lincoln Boyhood, pp. 34-35).

82. L. B. Barker of Tennyson, Indiana, letter to W. E. Williams, May 10, 1915, in Warrick County Brief, p. 40. Two affidavits in the same brief also contain information on the disappearance of the cabin. Jacob Clark on April 29, 1929, said his father told him that when Lincoln ran for President in 1860, Gentryville had a glee club. The bed of the glee club wagon was made out of lumber taken out of the old Lincoln house which stood where Lincoln City now stands (p. 38). Bartley Inco of Rockport, whose wife was the daughter of James Grigsby, who was the brother of Aaron Grigsby, who married Sarah Lincoln; on July 28, 1915, stated: "The old Lincoln farm, at Lincoln City, was afterwards owned by James Gentry and he sold the Lincoln house to some parties in Chicago who wanted it for a relic." (p. 37)

